

Edith Wharton Workshop



Wednesday 4 October, 2-5pm

Gannochy Seminar Room, Wolfson Medical Building, Glasgow University



TRANSATLANTIC LITERARY WOMEN SERIES

About TLW

The series explores the lives and writings of transatlantic women from the early nineteenth century to the present day. “Cultural Connections: Transatlantic Literary Women” offers a lively programme of free events, including talks, workshops, symposia, and a reading group. Join us!

Attention has traditionally focused on the writings of male (usually white) contributors to the transatlantic tradition and their place in the special Anglo-American literary relationship. As we approach the centenaries of suffrage and partial suffrage on both sides of the Atlantic, this project directs the spotlight to the still often overlooked work, achievements, struggles and impact of transatlantic literary *women*. The series explores how women from diverse cultural backgrounds and ethnicities used their writing to contribute to and at times reshape a special relationship and what we can learn from their lives and work today.

The series began in 2016/17 when we held a total of eleven events, ranging from book clubs to talks, workshops, creative writing showcases and our summer symposium with speakers from both sides of the Atlantic. We teamed up with organisations across Glasgow, including the Scottish Writers’ Centre, Northlight Heritage and Glasgow Women’s Library. In April we headed into the trenches for our Transatlantic Women and War Day at Pollok Park. Details of events are available on our website <https://transatlanticladies.wordpress.com/>, which also features podcasts of a number of our talks. Follow us on twitter: @atlantlitwomen

All events are free, fully open to the public and held in Glasgow, a city with a rich transatlantic cultural heritage.

Edith Wharton Workshop

Wednesday 4 October, 2-5pm, Gannochy Seminar Room, Wolfson Medical Building, University Avenue, Glasgow University.

Welcome to what we hope will be an engaging and informative afternoon devoted to one of America's most successful writers. However much or little you know about Edith Wharton and her work, this event is for you! The afternoon will feature talks, presentations, a quiz, film excerpts, and readings, alongside the results of our writing competition. And if all that isn't enough, free refreshments and snacks provided!



Schedule at a Glance:

Gannochy Seminar Room

- 2.00-2.10 Welcome and Introductions
- 2.10-2.30 Edith Wharton in Context
Laura Rattray
- 2.30-3.00 Wharton, Taste and Design
Ailsa Boyd
- 3.00-3.30 Wharton, Race and Class
Katie Ahern
- 3.30-3.50 Half Time: Tea, Sandwiches and Chat**
- 3.50-4.10 Edith McWharton? Edith Wharton in Scotland's Archives
Anna Girling
- 4.10-4.30 Wharton and the Theatre
Laura
- 4.30-5.00 Discussions, Quiz and Writing Competition Results
- 5.00-6.00 Wine & Soft Drinks Reception for any Whartonians still standing.
Head over to room 307, 4 University Gardens.

5 quiz questions (No internet cheating!) before every talk. Go solo or team up – the choice is yours. If necessary, we'll give a killer tie-breaker question at the end...



Edith Wharton

2.10-2.30: Edith Wharton in Context

Dr Laura Rattray

All things Wharton – or as many of them as will fit into 20 minutes: Wharton's work in context, feminism, modernism, her contemporaries and critical reception. Did you know that the author of *Ethan Frome*, *The House of Mirth*, *The Custom of the Country* and *The Age of Innocence* (for which Wharton became the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction) was also a poet, a playwright, a renowned designer, an animal rights' campaigner, and a woman honoured by the French government for her work in World War I? What did she think of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Virginia Woolf and vice versa. Many of you will have read *The Custom of the Country* and *Summer* for the American Women's Writing course (and discussed them in seminars this morning!). Where and how are these texts placed in a career that spanned more than forty years?



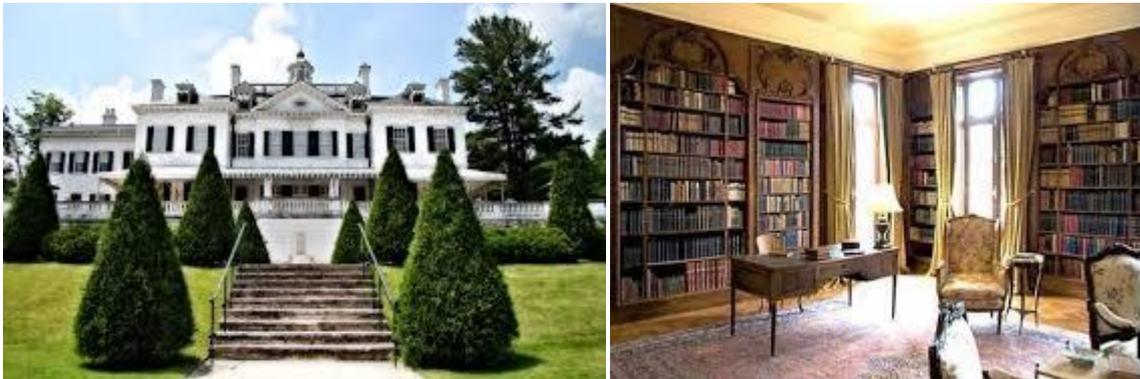
About Laura:

Laura is Reader in American Literature at Glasgow University and founder of the Transatlantic Literary Women Series. She is the editor of *The Unpublished Writings of Edith Wharton* (2009), *Edith Wharton's The Custom of the Country: A Reassessment* (2010), *Edith Wharton in Context* (2012), Oxford World Classics' *Summer* (2015) and co-editor of *Twenty-First Century Readings of Tender Is the Night* (2007). Laura and Mary Chinery recently brought to public attention Wharton's play *The Shadow of a Doubt*, a work previously unknown to Wharton scholars – the play and their article published in *The Edith Wharton Review* (Spring 2017.) She has also published on American fiction of the early twentieth century, the Hollywood novel, and neglected women writers.

2.30 - 3: Wharton, Taste and Interior Design

Dr Ailsa Boyd

Wharton is well known as a novelist of manners, with her novels set in the houses of the rich and privileged, but her first published book was a treatise on interior design, a subject she approached with academic seriousness. In novels like *The Custom of the Country*, décor is not mere set-dressing, but contributes to her critique of conspicuous consumption in a society where women like Undine Sprague are decorative objects in the marriage market. For Wharton, tasteful decoration was one of the building blocks of civilised life, and informs her writing about even the poorest surroundings, as with the habitations in *Summer*, confirming the consistency at every level of her ideas on creating a home, a place in which an appropriate life may be lived.



About Ailsa:

Ailsa is an independent writer, lecturer, conference organiser, editor and curator, with a special interest in the art, design and literature of the long nineteenth century, in particular, interior design and the agency of women within that space, as consumers, commentators and practitioners. She is currently completing a monograph, *Identity and Domestic Space in Victorian Literature: Houses and Fictions in George Eliot, Henry James and Edith Wharton*, with Palgrave Macmillan. <https://ailsaboyd.wordpress.com/>



3.00-3.30: Race and Class as Causes of Anxiety

Katie Ahern

Race and class are causes for intense anxiety throughout Edith Wharton's work – and discussed constantly – even if not explicitly. Wharton is often dismissed as a writer concerned with privilege and wealth, but this is a disservice to both her skill as a writer and her readers' intelligence. Differences of ethnicity and economic status provoke derision, confusion, and discomfort from the dominant social class, while the reader often has a very different reaction. When Charity Royall's social class causes dismay in *Summer*, and Undine Spragg's indifference to the customs of the long-established New York and European families causes discomfort, the reader may indeed wish to examine Wharton's motivation for such concerns.

Ambiguous depictions of Jewish characters in *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence* will help inform this reading of Wharton so broader thematic questions welcome, but the talk will focus on *Summer* and *The Custom of the Country*.

About Katie:

Katie is completing a PhD examining the representations of urban space in twentieth-century American literature, including the work of Edith Wharton, in University College Cork, Ireland.



3.30-3.50: Half Time: Tea, Sandwiches, Chat



3.50-4.10: Edith McWharton? Edith Wharton in Scotland's Archives

Anna Girling

Can a Scotland-based student working on or interested in Edith Wharton do archival work without leaving the country? The answer seems to be a fairly resounding “no”: all of the major archives of Wharton’s papers and manuscripts are in the United States – the Beinecke Library at Yale University, the Firestone at Princeton, the Harry Ransom Centre in Texas, and the Lilly Library in Indiana – and the archive of her major British publisher, Macmillan, is at the British Library in London. There are, however, a number of Wharton’s letters at the National Library of Scotland – part of the John Murray Archive. John Murray was Wharton’s first British publisher and she corresponded with him about a number of her early works. In this talk Anna discusses how she found these letters, and what they can tell us about Wharton’s very early career, in the years before she published her first bestseller, *The House of Mirth*.



About Anna:

Anna is in the latter stages of a PhD at the University of Edinburgh on Edith Wharton's early fiction. She has written about Wharton for the *Edith Wharton Review* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, and recently joined the board of the Edith Wharton Society.



4.10-4.30:

Wharton and the Theatre

Laura

This talk explores Wharton's largely forgotten work for the theatre. Plays include one of the most socially conscious pieces of writing Wharton ever produced and a dramatic dress rehearsal for her 1913 *tour de force*, *The Custom of the Country*. Laura also discusses the recent publication of *The Shadow of a Doubt*, an original full-length play by Wharton. The play, with a controversial plotline of euthanasia, was in production with America's top theatrical impresario Charles Frohman in early 1901, with Elsie de Wolfe in the leading role, and underscores that Wharton was establishing herself as a playwright at the beginning of the century – playwriting more important to her than establishing herself as a novelist during this period. Laura considers Wharton's work for the theatre and its impact on both her fiction and her wider career.

4.30 – 5. Discussions, Quiz and Writing Competition Results

There were two options for the competition. We asked you either to write a summary alternative ending to any work by Wharton, or a sequel. Entries could be anything from a single sentence to a passage of up to 250 words. They could be any style, any genre: prose, verse, comic, serious ...a chance to let your imagination roam!

Had you sometimes wished a work by Edith Wharton ended differently? This was your chance. Or had you sometimes wondered what might have happened after the final page? We asked you to let us know...

In alternative Wharton narratives, does *The House of Mirth*'s Lily Bart marry Rosedale, marry Selden to live un/happily ever after, marry neither? Move in with Gerty and learn to embrace dinginess? Does *The Custom of the Country*'s Undine achieve her latest wish and become an ambassador's wife? Does *Summer*'s Lawyer Royall get up from the armchair only to be stabbed by Charity with the brooch? Could there even be a happy ending to *Ethan Frome* – or is that beyond all our imaginations? The choice was yours!

Thank you to our Wharton speakers at the workshop for acting as judges for the competition. We'll be posting some of our favourite entries on the TLW site.

And the winners are...

5.00-6.00 Wine & Soft Drinks Reception for Whartonians still standing.
Head over to room 307, 4 University Gardens. See you there!

The TLW Committee:

Louisa Burden, Marine Furet, Saskia McCracken, Laura Rattray, Kari Sund and Sarah Thomson.

Find out more about us here:

<https://transatlanticladies.wordpress.com/meet-the-team/>

Our next event:

TLW Book Club – Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*

Tuesday 17 October, 17.15-19.00, Gilchrist Postgraduate Club, Gilbert Scott Building, University Avenue, Glasgow University.

The book club is back! Join us for a fun, informal, discussion about Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar*. Whether you’re new to Plath, study her, or a devoted fan, join us. In true TLW style, free refreshments and snacks will be provided. We’re meeting in the postgrad club -- named after Marion Gilchrist, the first female graduate of the university -- but you definitely don’t have to be a postgrad to join us. ALL WELCOME!

Keep up with the series here: <https://transatlanticladies.wordpress.com/>

And on twitter: @atlantlitwomen

Thank you for being part of the event today!